

Divine Strake hearing in Idaho

■ Defense Threat Reduction Agency schedules public information meeting in Boise

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ST. GEORGE — Federal representatives will visit Idaho to make the case for Divine Strake, yielding to demands to widen the public's involvement in the run-up to the controversial weapons test, Idaho leaders announced Wednesday.

The Defense Threat Reduction Agency and the National Nuclear Security Administration have agreed to a public information session in Boise, Idaho, on Jan. 28 to answer questions about the proposed 700-ton ammonium nitrate and fuel oil blast stand for the Nevada Test Site.

"I am very pleased that Idaho will have the same opportunity as Nevada and Utah to learn more and to voice our concerns in ways that should have occurred much earlier in the process, and in ways that should have

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occurred several decades ago when tests in Nevada did impact Idaho's citizens," said Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, in a statement.

The session format will resemble the series of meetings held in Las Vegas, Salt Lake City and St. George earlier this month. An exact location and time have not been announced.

DTRA spokeswoman Irene Smith did not respond to repeated requests for confirma-

tion Wednesday.

An environmental assessment released in December confirmed critics' fears that the mushroom cloud generated by the open-air test would resuspend latent radiation from previous nuclear experiments. But the report said the "radiological dose" would not reach a level that would pose a significant risk — or require further environmental review. The NNSA will accept public comment on that document until Feb. 7.

Craig, along with Sen. Mike Crapo, Rep. Mike Simpson and

Rep. Bill Sali, wrote DTRA Director James Tegen on Jan. 5 to demand additional public sessions on Divine Strake and the environmental study. They cited previous nuclear tests that "created mistrust, concern and confusion in Idaho."

A National Cancer Institute report released in 1997 listed several counties in Idaho, Montana and Utah that received significant doses of radiation from nuclear tests in the 1950s and 1960s.

"Clearly, Idahoans need more answers concerning the Divine Strake experiment, in large part

because past tests at the Nevada Test Site have led to the downwind effects of radiation," said Crapo on Wednesday. "While there is no definitive proof that this non-nuclear test will result in the scattering of radioactive material, I cannot support the Divine Strake test until I see evidence that it will not bring harm to Idahoans."

Idaho downwinders have decried their exclusion from a federal system of compensation that they believe plays politics with victims' health and safety.

"That's why a lot of the down-

winders have started to say what we want is justice, not more 'just us,' meaning the 22 counties that are covered (by the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act)," said Idahoan J. Preston Truman, director of the group Downwinders.

The widening ring of public involvement will make it difficult for the Pentagon to resume nuclear testing in the future, Truman said. It also sends a message to downwinders in St. George that they're not alone.

"The more you pay, the less you can play, and then the more

they have to deal with the sentiments of the public," he said.

Alyson Heyrend, spokeswoman for Rep. Jim Matheson, D-Utah, said Wednesday the congressman is pushing for additional Divine Strake public meetings to include everyone affected by previous tests.

"Medical studies confirm that radioactive fallout affected nearly every county in America, raising widespread concerns about the health consequences of that past exposure," she said. "He understands the public's distrust of what is planned at the Nevada Test Site."